



## **ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT**

# Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland  
Volume 21, Number 1, January 2007

ACT's monthly meetings are held at 7:30 PM, the second Tuesday of each month, at the Silver Spring Center, 8818 Georgia Avenue (near the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Spring Street), in the Woodside Conference Room.

The Silver Spring Center is a ten minute walk north of the Silver Spring Metro Station; it is a two-block walk from the nearest Ride-On #5 stop; and, the Metrobus "Q" and "Y" routes pass in front of the Center.

Please sign in at the Security Desk in the lobby when attending meetings. For meeting updates check our website listed on pg. 2.

Jan 9: Election of ACT Officers - See p. 8 for nominations. Come and vote.

Feb 13: Pamela Lindstrom, Urban Planning Leader of Sierra Club, Montgomery County - "Linking Transportation and Urban Development"

March 13: Speaker TBD

... Upcounty Commuters Need Rapid Rail Transit, Not A Slow Bus To Nowhere (p. 4)

... Metrobus to Get Hydrogen Fuel Cell Buses (p. 5)

... Federal Landscape Change Favorable to Transit (p. 6)

### **Transit Backers Hail County Council's Unanimous Vote for Purple Line**

Ben Ross

Transit supporters hailed the unanimous endorsement of the Purple Line by the Montgomery County Council on December 12. In a landmark 9-0 vote that overcomes 20 years of division, the Council endorsed building the new transit line as a light rail line running generally above ground from Bethesda to New Carrollton.

The Council also broke new ground by going on record for building the Corridor Cities Transitway, which would run northward from Shady Grove, as light rail rather than a busway. The resolution also says the project should provide excellent service between Shady Grove and Clarksburg; the transitway alignment now under study is not intended for this purpose and follows a winding route that terminates south of Clarksburg's town center. (See page 4.)

The resolution further endorsed providing more assured funding for Metro,

### **Feature Articles**

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... MARC Stations to Stay Open (p. 3)

... US 29 Bridges Support Future Light Rail (p. 3)

... Secretary Flanagan's Purple Line Comments Blasted (p. 4)

## Join ACT Now

You can join ACT by remitting membership dues. Your membership dues are based on the category of membership that you choose:

\$10 [rider (code R on mail label)]

\$25 [activist (code A on mail label)]

\$50 [conductor (code C on mail label)]

[the two digits after your category of membership code indicates year paid]

Send your check for the chosen category of membership to:

**Action Committee for Transit**

**P.O. Box 7074**

**Silver Spring, MD 20907**

**[www.actfortransit.org](http://www.actfortransit.org)**

You may also give your membership dues to Treasurer John Carroll at the next ACT meeting. The address on your check will be used as the mailing address unless otherwise indicated.

Your dues support ACT Activities and this newsletter.

The unanimous County Council support for the Purple Line reflects the results of the November election, in which Purple Line supporter Roger Berliner defeated the County Council's last remaining project opponent. Each of the last three council elections has increased the number of Purple Line supporters; from a shaky 5-4 majority in the council elected in 1994, to 6-3 support in 1998 and a 7-2 majority after the 2002 election.

## THANK YOU BEN!

Ben Ross, who has served ACT for 11 years as president, is stepping down from his position after the ACT Election this month. For one thing, Ben does not own a car -- relying solely on transit to get around. Under Ben's leadership ACT membership skyrocketed from under 100 members to over 1000 members. Ben got ACT to hire its first staff person.

Ben literally brought ACT to the forefront of news through unceasing letters to the editor and press release after press release. Whenever there is a newspaper article about a transit issue, you can be sure that the reporter will interview Ben to get ACT's perspective. Ben attracted some of the best and brightest people in transit to join ACT. Ben is constantly thinking ahead, making sure we keep transit issues in the forefront, starting with the Georgetown Branch trolley, then the Corridor Cities Transitway, and now the Purple Line light rail.

However, he doesn't stop there as you can see by his article in this newsletter on the Route 29 bridges. Ben takes initiative in coming up with political strategies to advocate and improve transit. Kudos to Ben for creating ACT's Voter Information Committee and the scorecard for where candidates stand on transit. Not only that, he gets right in and does whatever needs to

and identified the three transit items as the county's highest transportation priority.

The Purple Line has previously won the unanimous support of the Prince George's Council, and Governor-Elect Martin O'Malley repeated his support for it at the Dec. 11 Committee for Montgomery breakfast. "*Consensus has been achieved at long last,*" commented Action Committee for Transit President Ben Ross. "*Now let's get on with the job and get it built.*"

be done, from delivering leaflets door-to-door to passing out flyers at the Metro to standing out with the ACT banner on busy roadways to draw attention to the Purple Line. Ben has been a dedicated and energetic leader. ACT and all of Montgomery County, even those who drive, ironically, are better off for it.

Thank You Ben!

## MARC Stations to Stay Open

Miriam Schoenbaum

The Boyds and Dickerson MARC stations will stay open, at least for now. The closure of the stations, supposedly due to low ridership, was announced last January. However, after public outcry, emergency legislation introduced by State Senator Rob Garagiola kept the stations open for at least another year and required Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) to answer a list of questions before closing them.

In November, Senator Garagiola received a letter from Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Secretary Robert Flanagan, stating that the MDOT currently has no plans to close the stations. In addition, according to ACT Vice President for Legislation, Jim Clarke, Flanagan stated at the Montgomery County "Road Show" before the election that MTA would not try to close the stations as long as Montgomery County, which pays for station maintenance, was working to increase ridership.

Montgomery County soon plans to mail brochures promoting ridership at the upcounty MARC stations (Boyds, Barnesville, and Dickerson) and offering a free one-week pass to new train commuters. The brochures will also include a survey designed by Save Maryland Area Rail Transit (SMART), intended to identify the improvements in MARC service, which would increase ridership in the upcounty area most

effectively. In response to SMART, Montgomery County also recently expanded and, for the first time, paved the Boyds MARC station parking lot.

For more information, see the Gazette article from November 29 at [http://www.gazette.net/stories/112906/germnew193748\\_31975.shtml](http://www.gazette.net/stories/112906/germnew193748_31975.shtml)

## US 29 Bridges Support Future Light Rail

Ben Ross

This article was written as a follow-up to the discussion at the recent "Road Show" about US 29 grade-separated interchange projects. Six or seven years ago, when the overpasses now being completed were being planned, ACT wrote to Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) requesting that the bridges be built high enough to accommodate a possible future light rail line in the US 29 median.

Such a project has been evaluated in past studies but not pursued, primarily because of the absence of right of way for a surface light rail line between downtown Silver Spring and White Oak, and because of the extreme expense of tunneling that distance. However, future needs for transit access in the corridor could revive the project (which we show in a generalized form on our "vision" of a Montgomery County transit network at: <http://www.innerpurpleline.org/images/ACTflyerinside-Color.gif>) and the Purple Line might offer the potential for cost savings by connecting White Oak to University Blvd & Piney Branch Road rather than directly to downtown Silver Spring.

At the time of our previous request, SHA engineers responded with a much less expensive solution: they proposed to build deeper footings for the center pier of the bridge, so that if a light rail line is ever built, the grade of the median could be lowered to

provide clearance under the bridge without undermining the bridge. This was totally satisfactory to us, and as we understood it at the time, the bridges were designed in this way.

I inquired in regard to the four additional interchanges that are now in the planning and design process, to whom should we contact to request that similar accommodations are made with these bridges? While light rail on US 29 is not on the agenda for the near future or probably even the intermediate future, this small design accommodation would add very little cost to the bridge projects and would save an enormous amount of money if light rail is ever built.

The response received from Kate Mazzara, Assistant District Engineer - Project Development, District 3 of SHA was as follows:

*I have forwarded your email to the current US 29 project manager, Mr. Tom Kubicz of our Highway Design Office. He is also cc'd on this email. I also spoke to Melinda Peters, the previous project manager, and she understood that all the upcoming bridges would accommodate future light rail the same way the Briggs Chaney, MD 198, and Randolph Road Bridges do.*

### A Sad Note

ACT member Jean Linehan passed away on Wednesday, Dec. 13. Jean served as a volunteer on some of our ACT projects. As one ACT member who knew Jean put it, "*Jean was a member, not only of ACT, but many other groups as well. She was a true activist and will be missed.*" Our condolences to her family.

## Secretary Flanagan's Purple Line Comments Blasted

Joint Press Release of September 29, 2006 from  
Coalition Against Beltway Expansion and Action  
Committee for Transit

Maryland Transportation Secretary Robert Flanagan is ignoring his own budget when he claims that the Purple Line is too expensive, charged Citizens Against Beltway Expansion (CABE) coordinator Joe Davies.

Today's Gazette newspaper quotes Flanagan as saying that building the Purple Line from Bethesda to the Wilson Bridge "*could bankrupt the entire transportation budget and the entire state.*"

Yet Flanagan has proposed a statewide network of Express Toll Lanes. Most of the multi-billion dollar cost of building these new lanes will be paid by taxpayers, the majority of whom will find them too expensive to use regularly. CABE has projected that the peak one-way toll to drive the Washington Beltway from US 50 to the American Legion Bridge would be as much as \$17.00, yet construction would still require heavy state subsidies. For the calculation of the \$17 toll, see: <http://www.nobeltwayexpansion.org/beltway/whytolls.htm>

Action Committee for Transit President Ben Ross, in a recent article in the respected quarterly Dissent, calculated that the toll revenues on the state's I-95 widening north of Baltimore won't even cover the incremental costs of building toll lanes instead of free lanes. The Maryland Transportation Authority has said that it has no revenue estimate for the project, even though the state has broken ground on this \$800 million investment. The Ross article is at: <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=658>

*"Mr. Flanagan poses as a fiscal conservative," commented CABE's Davies. "Yet he's throwing billions of dollars at highway contractors to build toll roads that will be so expensive that most commuters won't be able to use them."*

## Upcounty Commuters Need Rapid Rail Transit, Not A Slow Bus To Nowhere

ACT Press Release of Oct. 19, 2006

Upcounty community leaders and transit activists today called on the Maryland Dept. of Transportation to reverse course and provide rapid rail transit to communities north of Shady Grove. Organizations endorsing the appeal include:

Save Maryland Area Rail Transit  
Clarksburg Town Center Advisory Committee  
Clarksburg Civic Association  
Action Committee for Transit  
Montgomery Countryside Alliance

The upcounty leaders demanded immediate placement of an order for additional trains for MARC commuter rail. The state's contract with the CSX railroad, which owns the tracks MARC trains run on, allows it to run three more trains per day. But the state budget includes no money to buy new locomotives and passenger cars for those trains, and the state has even tried to close some MARC stations.

The group also called for construction of the Corridor Cities Transitway as a rail line that provides fast connections from town centers to Shady Grove. While the state will not officially decide until next year whether the new transit line will be a light rail line or a road for buses, the Ehrlich administration has expressed a clear preference for buses over light rail.

In addition, the transitway route selected by the Maryland Transit Administration bypasses the town centers of Clarksburg, Kentlands, Lakelands, and Crown Farm, stopping instead at isolated parking lots. A trip from Germantown to Shady Grove that now takes 15 minutes by express bus would take 29 minutes if the transitway is built according to current plans. *"We need accessible rapid rail, not a slow bus to nowhere,"* said Clarksburg civic leader Greg Fioravanti.

The civic and transit group will join business groups and elected officials next

Monday, Oct. 23, in a press conference in support of building the Corridor Cities Transitway as light rail. The press conference was held at 8:00 am at Shady Grove Metro.

Joining in the appeal were the following:

Richard Arkin, President, Kentlands Citizen Assembly\*  
Andrea Arnold, Montgomery Countryside Alliance  
Tim Dearros, Vice President, Clarksburg Civic Association  
Lynne Fantle, Clarksburg Town Center Advisory Committee  
Greg Fioravanti, Treasurer, Clarksburg Civic Association  
Kathie Hulley, President, Clarksburg Civic Association  
Carol Oberdorfer, President, Dickerson Community Assn.\*  
Amy Presley, Clarksburg Town Center Advisory Committee  
Ben Ross, President, Action Committee for Transit  
Miriam Schoenbaum, Save Maryland Area Rail Transit  
Stewart Schwartz, Coalition for Smarter Growth  
Kim Shiley, Clarksburg Town Center Advisory Committee

\*organization listed for identification only

## Metrobus to Get Hydrogen Fuel Cell Buses

Quon Kwan

On October 12, 2006, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced that the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), Bus Transportation Operations (Metrobus) will receive two grants totaling nearly \$14.5 million to explore new ways to make commercially viable hydrogen fuel cell buses a reality.

FTA Administrator James Simpson made the announcement in Thousand Palms, CA, that Metrobus was selected by the FTA to receive a share of \$49 million in nationwide grants for hydrogen fuel cell buses over a five-year period. Among transit agency grant

recipients, Metrobus received the largest share of the grant funds.

However, this is NOT the first time that the Washington, DC area has had a hydrogen bus. An experimental hydrogen fuel cell bus, also funded by FTA, is located at Georgetown University; it runs on hydrogen made by reforming liquid methanol stored on board the bus. This experimental bus has never been put into revenue service. [Your Transit Times editor rode this bus on a special trip reserved for FTA officials.]

*“Through this national program, we can consolidate—and accelerate—the process of making hydrogen buses commercially feasible as cleaner, more energy efficient alternatives,”* said Simpson.

Currently in the U.S., there are a total of eight transit buses that run on hydrogen fuel. There are two fuel cell buses at Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (San Jose, CA), two hybrid, fuel cell buses at Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (Oakland, CA), two hydrogen fuel cell buses and one hydrogen hybrid internal combustion bus at Sunline Transit Agency (Thousand Palms – where the FTA Administration announced the grants). The eighth hydrogen bus is at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, as previously mentioned.

Metrobus and its research partners United Technologies Corporation Power (UTC) (a U.S. fuel cell manufacturer), Shell Hydrogen, Booz Allen Hamilton (engineering consultants), and Northeastern Advanced Vehicle Consortium (NAVC) (project coordinator) will receive \$8.3 million for the development of four hybrid 40-foot hydrogen fuel cell buses.

Another \$6.1 million in grant funds will go toward the development and demonstration of two 40-foot buses using a different hydrogen fuel cell technology. This includes research partners Ballard Power Systems (Canadian fuel cell manufacturer), Shell Hydrogen, ISE Corp. (supplier of hybrid electric drive system), New Flyer (glider or bus platform), Booz Allen

Hamilton (engineering consultant), and NAVC (project coordinator).

Shell Hydrogen would construct two new hydrogen filling stations. The existing Shell Hydrogen filling station, located in northeast Washington, DC on Benning Road, is of inadequate capacity to serve the hydrogen Metrobuses. The hydrogen will be delivered in liquefied form by tank truck and converted into compressed gas for fueling.

*“This national fuel cell bus technology development program positions Metrobus as a leader and innovator in alternative fuel technology,”* said WMATA Interim General Manager Dan Tangherlini. Metro’s bus fleet includes 1,476 buses of which 414 are compressed natural gas buses (CNGs), 50 hybrid electric buses [see *Transit Times*, volume 20, No. 1, January 2006 issue], 117 clean diesel buses, and the remaining are ultra low sulphur diesel fuel buses.

The multimillion dollar funding for the two grants to Metrobus was made possible through the National Fuel Cell Transit Bus Program, under the recently enacted Safe, Accountable, Flexible, efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

## **Federal Landscape Change Favorable to Transit**

Last month brings many more transit-oriented leaders to the corridors of Congress although the serious federal deficit and expensive war make expansion of the funding available for transit uncertain.

From the top, the appreciation and support of Transit is likely to be noteworthy. Representative Nancy Pelosi, the incoming Speaker represents San Francisco and the Bay area, home of BART and MUNI. Maryland’s own Steny Hoyer, the House Majority Whip represents a district that will benefit from the Purple Line. Minnesota Rep. Jim Oberstar will

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be Chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (T&I), which has jurisdiction over highways, transit, Amtrak, aviation and many key environmental statutes. Rep. Oberstar has been a leader on expanding travel options. He has been a longstanding champion of the 1991 ISTEA law and the principles it embraced as well as a strong advocate for restoring intercity passenger rail capacities in the U.S.

On the House T&I Committee, it is noteworthy that the current 75-member panel is the largest in Congressional history. Currently, there are 41 Republican Members and 34 Democratic Members, a ratio that presumably will be retained in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, with the Democrats holding the majority share of the seats. Unlike the Senate where power is shared with other Senators, Rep. Oberstar as T&I Chair will exert tremendous influence over the panel's staff and the agenda of the Subcommittees.

The Senate leadership starts with Nevada Senator Harry Reid as Senate Majority Leader, with Illinois Senator Dick Durbin selected Senate Majority Whip. Unlike the House where the key policy areas are concentrated with the House T&I Committee, policy control over surface transportation issues is spread among three panels.

**Senate EPW Committee:** Another prominent Californian, Senator Barbara Boxer will lead the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW) which has sole jurisdiction over highways, some safety issues and many key environmental statutes. Sen. Boxer is another Bay area native, having begun her career as a Marin County Supervisor. Under Senator Boxer, will be Senator Max Baucus, (D-MT), serving as Chair of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure. Serving on the committee will also be our own Senator Ben Cardin.

**Senate Banking Committee:** Connecticut Senator Chris Dodd will chair the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, which has jurisdiction over transit programs and policy as well as housing policy.

In addition to being a strong leader on transit issues, he has focused attention on the need to coordinate transit services with human services, provide stronger commitments to connecting low-income workers to employment centers, and the linkages between housing policy and transportation investments. His home state, under the leadership of Republican Governor Jodi Rell who was reelected Nov. 7th, has recently been placing greater emphasis on rail transit investment and smart growth.

**Senate Commerce Committee:** Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye will chair the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, which sets the Senate's policy on Amtrak, freight rail, highway safety rules and aviation. In this Congress, Senator Inouye engaged outgoing panel chair, Sen. John McCain, Sen. Lott and others in crafting legislation to provide new funding for Amtrak's needs as well as resources to support state efforts in promoting expanded intercity rail services. This legislation is now awaiting Congressional action, but final action is likely during the next Congress. Sen. Carper, a longtime leader on Amtrak issues, joins the panel for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. Sen. Lott, who is again assuming a Senate leadership role, will be better positioned to support a resolution of the Amtrak funding issues.

While the war in Iraq trumped transportation and many other important domestic issues in the federal election, the emerging debate on the need to focus on maintaining and improving our transportation infrastructure is not over. Still, with the Federal contribution to transit hovering in the \$1.5 to \$1.8 billion range, projects need to be compelling to compete with other jurisdictions needs. The Purple Line has one major advantage – most members of Congress travel on the beltway and our inner suburban roads when they are in Washington.

[Adapted from a longer report and with permission of the author, Kevin McCarty, Surface Transportation Policy Partnership.  
[www.transact.org](http://www.transact.org)]

### Volunteers – We Couldn’t Do it Without You

Cindy Snow

Thank you to all our volunteers who helped us with the many ACTivities of the last quarter of 2006. It started with the fearless souls who joined right in on the tour of the Purple Line (PL) right-of-way by State Secretary of Transportation, Flanagan and sponsored by PL opponents. Our volunteers made sure the Secretary heard both sides of the story. Then came the work of delivering flyers door-to-door in neighborhoods along the Beltway to help the Coalition Against Beltway Expansion (CABE) pass out their scorecard for the general election. Just before the Nov. election Governor Ehrlich attended a fundraiser held for him at, where else but, the Columbia County Club. Our dedicated volunteers were there with the ACT banner and signs to show our support for the Purple Line. The TV crews were there, too, and ACT had its minute of fame on Channel 7 News & News Channel 8. The willingness of our volunteers to help always impresses me.

### Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is March 13. Send your materials to Quon at: **siufung@erols.com** or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

### ACT Officers Nominated for 2007:

- President: Hans Riemer
- V. Pres. (Legislation): Jim Clarke
- V. Pres. (Neighborhood Programs):  
Kathy Jentz
- V. Pres. (Services): Ben Ross
- Secretary: Harry Sanders
- Treasurer: John Carroll
- Board Member: John Fay
- Board Member: Miriam Schoenbaum

Come to the Jan 9 meeting ready to vote; Nominations from the floor will be accepted.  
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- Program Chair: Neil Greene
- Staff Member: Cindy Snow  
cindy@innerpurpleline.org

**FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED**

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